

1933

I Accuse Stalinism!

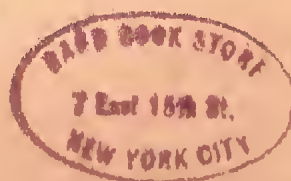
An Open Letter to the C.C. of the
Communist Party of Germany
And the E.C.C.I.

by

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Maria Reese and the Communist International

A FOREWORD BY
LEON TROTSKY

In her open letter, published by the newspaper *Unser Wort*, Maria Reese spoke the harsh and bitter truth about the party to which she belonged until very recently. The German agency of the Comintern bureaucracy understood nothing, foresaw nothing, prepared nothing. Revolutionary work it replaced by hollow phrases and boastfulness. It fooled the workers and the party year in and year out. The Central Committee fooled even its own apparatus. People who occupied responsible posts in the party like Torgler, head of the parliamentary fraction, or Maria Reese herself, deputy of the Reichstag, believed honestly to the last moment that the Central Committee had its plans, that it had prepared the necessary fighting forces, that the Comintern knew whither it was leading the German workers. With Hitler's coming to power and especially with the burning of the Reichstag by Goering's agents, the revolutionary illusions of the best elements of the party fell into dust. The Central Committee left the party to the mercy of fate without leadership, without slogans, even without explanations. Another such treachery on the part of the leaders is unknown in the history of the revolutionary struggle. It is not hard to imagine the dark despair of the betrayed masses and the frightful helplessness of the party apparatus.

An Unbearable Contrast

The emigrant activity of Muenzenberg, Heckert and Co.: false reports, lying correspondence, hollow and sham congresses intended to throw dust into the eyes, could not but appear to Maria Reese as an unbearable contrast to the

inner events in Germany. Maria Reese demanded a discussion on what occurred. She tried to obtain a change in the policy of masquerades to that of the revolutionary mobilization of the world proletariat against Fascism. At her every attempt she met just a blank wall. Reese then drew all the conclusions for herself: she broke with the Comintern and placed herself under the banner of the Fourth International.

After that the Stalinist bureaucracy, which has nothing more to lose politically, "expelled" Reese from the Comintern. But also into this act these bankrupts introduced all the traits of vengeful and lying impotence characteristic of them. The main accusation against comrade Reese consists in the fact that she joined the camp of "counter-revolutionary Trotskyism". This estimation is not a new one! The "revolutionary" work of the Stalinists consists in systematic aid to Chiang Kai-Shek, Plisudski, Citrin, Wels, Hitler. According to this logic, Marxian criticism of these crimes is "counter-revolutionary" work. But this is not all. The resolution adopted in the name of the German Communist Party, that is, by a few bankrupts hiding in emigration, accuses Maria Reese of "rendering aid to the government of Hitler and thus delivering to the latter, party members and sympathizers". The awakened German proletariat will brand this base accusation on the foreheads of the accusers!

Maria Reese is "expelled" for her courageous open letter, that is, after she herself broke with the Comintern. To call the bankrupts openly by the name of bankrupts is a direct duty of a true and sincere revolutionary. If Reese's letter can have any influence on the fate of the Communists persecuted by Hitler and particularly on the course of the Reichstag trial, it is only as invaluable testimony in favor of the accused. From the letter it is clear even to the blind how far removed the official party was from the thought of insurrection, from the preparation for an insurrection and consequently from such "signals" to insurrection as the Reichstag fire!

She Spoke the Truth

The Stalinist bureaucracy takes revenge for the fact that a responsible comrade who found herself until very recently in its ranks has openly and honestly spoken the truth about the leadership, the regime and the practices of the Comintern. The bureaucracy forgives cowardice, forgery, treachery and betrayals under one condition: to bring no tales out of school. For these people the laws of mutual responsibility have long replaced the laws of revolution and of Marxism. The fight for inflated personal prestige, for posts and for an assured livelihood have pushed to the background the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship. Maria Reese convinced herself of it on the tragic experience of the German proletariat. Together with her thousands and tens of thousands of betrayed revolutionaries have gone through the same experience. In jails and concentration camps they are drawing a balance from the catastrophe lived through. The letter of Maria Reese calls them to courageous revolutionary conclusions. It is the duty of every revolutionary in the whole world to publish, reprint and circulate the letter of Maria Reese in all the languages in which the exploited and the revolutionaries speak.

November 10, 1933.

Letter to the C.C. of the Communist Party of Germany and the E.C.C.I.

For months I attempted unremittingly to clarify my political differences with the party and the leadership of the Red Aid* by conducting a discussion both in writing and in person. These attempts all miscarried. My letters to Moscow were for the most part concealed, suppressed, or simply not forwarded, and the discipline that compelled me to say nothing before outsiders about inner party differences, was used to slander and isolate me.

Our last discussion, in which my political accusations were not taken up, convinced me that I could not retract my written statement of September 23. On the contrary, in order to clarify the situation, I must elaborate and emphasize the fact that the issues are *basic political questions*, taking on prime importance now even in your "Committee Politics" which are nothing but the inevitable result of your fatal policy, before Hitler's seizure of power. This policy evidences a *typical petty bourgeois lack of confidence in the power of the proletariat for mass struggle*. Abroad you allowed this lack of confidence to degenerate further into *actual contempt for mass movements*, cluttered up with phrases and philistine overestimation of the liberal bourgeoisie, which to your mind are to replace the class struggle and the defeated Communist Party.

How You are Fighting Against a Marxian Policy

Even before the German defeat branded you with disgrace, you disappeared into illegality in order to preserve your precious leadership of the working class for the period following the collapse, and left us, the army of simple soldiers, leaderless. Your committee politics now completely separated you from the mass movement, with which, as re-

* Rote Hilfe—I. L. D., or "Red Aid".

representatives of the bureaucratic party machine, you had long ago lost all contact. Due to your sectarian policies in the past years, you have not created a single mass movement in Germany or internationally—on the contrary, in the face of the revolutionizing of the masses you have weakened yourselves. In despair you are now seeking support in the arms of the lords and countesses, as the social democrats did with Hindenburg and Brüning.

Your opportunism is so incorrigible that you are actually unable to grasp the idea that I am opposed to committee politics *on principle*. So you told your bourgeois "allies" that I insulted them because I opposed your deception of the working class by advancing these people as the standard bearers of anti-Fascism, and in your intimate "united front" with them you sabotaged my work for the Red Aid and the defeated German working class. Where Fascism is making strides in their countries, it encounters no resistance from your bourgeois "allies". But your policy obstructs the creation of the proletarian mass movement which alone can offer effective resistance, as I have repeated so often, in my numerous oral and written protests....

I do not intend to return to the Soviet Union and sacrifice my revolutionary work for the sake of relief from financial cares. Moscow—i. e., the Comintern, not the workers—masks its contemptuous estimate of your utter bankruptcy from considerations of foreign policy, to which it is willing to sacrifice the world proletariat, and agrees that you are to continue to "lead" the workers' movement in Germany (from Paris cafes, to be sure), while you explain to the deserted German workers that you are at the front.

In this way you allow yourselves to hand out "brave" and provocative orders, to which the cream of the proletariat is then stupidly sacrificed. So that with Muenzenberg's irresponsible committee behind you it is not hard to play at revolution in Paris.

The ukase of the Comintern left the C. P. G. defenseless, by encouraging sentimentality, rebuking the democratic influence of the workers on policy and party leadership, and preventing free choice of leaders. Anyone who thinks in-

dependently is dragged before a secret, self-appointed tribunal. But when a situation arose in which Moscow left you without orders, you great leaders lost your heads and had no idea what to do. You had arrogantly set aside the workers' democracy that could have informed you about their strength and fighting spirit, that would even have had the strength to lead the parrots of Moscow in the fatal hour. It never entered your minds that you could learn from workers, that the worker himself, in the ever-sharpening process of the class struggle, has assimilated many new ideas from which you not only could learn but should have been forced to learn and make use of in the struggle. For a year and a half the committee for mass work to which I belonged did not meet, although I protested altogether, in writing and by word of mouth, at least fifty times, because I wished the organized building of the united front and not merely amiable congresses, from which the workers returned home empty-handed because you did not build a genuine united front. The experiences of the workers were not practically applied. When, as in Brunswick, they spontaneously broke through the strangling bureaucratic embrace of the S. P. G. and the C. P. G., they were soon scattered once more, because of the lack of organizational spade work. But long after the united front had sunk peacefully into a coma, we were still reading in the papers about its success—for which the apparatus took credit. Moscow must be shown how efficient we are.

I presented memoranda on all these questions to the central committee, but the great strategists of the C. P. G. were devoting their energies to putting through a few of the undigested theses they had memorized, or to the organization of factional struggles for minor offices. Moreover, you knew everything so much better than you do now. *But in the decisive moment you knew nothing.* That is the strongest proof that you never knew anything and never will.

Opportunistic Committee Politics

I am fighting against your committee politics because it is a crime against the working class and has no connec-

tion whatever with the revolutionary class struggle. It is the politics of the desperate, of the beaten, of those who have lost faith in the power of the working class. It is nothing other than the continuation of Muenzenberg's noisy congresses where telegrams of congratulation from Heinrich Mann and Einstein purported to take the place of the united front that was never achieved.

You have always taken the path of least resistance and especially now, since it brings you money through Muenzenberg. A source that imperialism will stop when it no longer needs you. But the Red Aid is not built up by your false policies, and because of your methods it is today almost without funds.

You are unwilling to discuss politically the questions of committee politics and the German catastrophe. You feel much more at home in committee politics. Besides, the line is laid down in Moscow, therefore it is correct. So, without discussions, we in Germany were catapulted into Fascism. But today the workers who trusted your leadership must pay for your irresponsibility. From February 28th on I was nearly broken by it. I can no longer wait silently for experience to demonstrate the falseness of that policy. There is a so-called "discipline" that is a crime against the working class. To be silent about committee-politics is just such a crime. Therefore you make alliances with foreign lords and countesses who have as little love for our *militant* comrades as Hitler's barons have.

It is not you, as another comrade of the Political Committee naively claimed, who are making use of these people—it is imperialism that is making use of you, in order with your active assistance to obstruct the struggles and the revolutionary advance in its own countries. In this way you are indirectly fostering the development of Fascism in these countries, and stabbing the world proletariat in the back, especially the German and the Russian. *This is what I am fighting against.* Only world-wide solidarity of the proletariat can save the German workers and defend the Soviet Union, which is threatened now by nothing worse than the present policy of the Comintern.

Sabotage Against the Red Aid

From the beginning you have sabotaged my work for the Red Aid, because you prefer Muenzenberg's cash box, which is not controlled by working class organizations, but only by a few of his henchmen. In this way you as well as Muenzenberg can hide behind the excuse that the lord does not wish this or that which is to the advantage of the working class), but prefers some other thing (which of course is not to his interest or to that of the big business-man Muenzenberg!)

So, according to the comrades, the lord would not endure my speaking at a meeting called by the committee in London in July, because in one little sentence I wished to refer to the fact that in there was a defense organization in Germany whose members risked life and limb to help the victims of German Fascism—namely the Red Aid. I then refused to speak as a protest against this opportunist line. Copies of the protest are in your hands and in Moscow. In reality the lord probably knew nothing about all this. Katz dictated the line for Muenzenberg as follows: *to refrain from all promotion of the Red Aid in favor of the committee treasury over which the workers have no control.* At least the funds of the Red Aid are controlled by the apparatus of a labor organization. Part of the money would be used for the victims of Fascism in Germany. They never see a penny of the Committee collections. Those henchmen, who owe an accounting to nobody, will see to that. The Red Aid is virtually without funds for its tremendous task. Just now it would have been easy to build it up, and create the basis for a powerful support. You have *intentionally* obstructed that, and the Comintern parties of western Europe share the responsibility for this.

I came back from Moscow in order to rally the Red Aid. In the interest of your committee strong box you made it impossible for me to organize a single meeting for this purpose. No tactics were too filthy for you to use to discredit me in your clique. You suddenly set the Comintern apparatus against me. Katz, the agent of Muenzen-

berg, used money collected for the German anti-Fascists to chase after me, to sabotage my work and make it impossible. Finally you answered my protests with a decree forbidding my work, because I had said something against Muenzenberg, and you effected my recall to Moscow. You utter bankrupts actually had the impertinence to imagine that you could seal my lips with a command. *Before* your last unmasking and your catastrophic collapse in Germany I would have accepted and obeyed a party order from you, but not *afterwards*.

The Disgraceful Capitulation to Hitler

Where do you get the effrontery to pose before me as leaders? Since Hitler's seizure of power I have seen how contemptible you are. I was supposed to present political perspectives to the workers' mass meetings, but after Hitler's accession you were suddenly dumb and we had not the least idea of your plans. I never dreamed you could be so irresponsible as to desert the workers without any plan of defense—after posing for years as their leaders and promising to lead them in the struggle. Even if the preconditions for a revolution were lacking because the social democratic leaders absolutely refused to fight, and because our party, shackled by its sectarian position on the united front, had not won over the majority of the working class, still you had no right to leave the revolutionary party in the lurch without any plan of defense. I was uneasy, like all the workers with whom I spoke. "The Party has not enough confidence in us." "We have to know where we're at." "We can't simply let ourselves be butchered." "There must be orders from above to take care of the whole country"—etc., said the workers. They were thinking, not of revolution, but of defense, believing that the social democratic workers would be drawn with them and perhaps thus make a revolution possible after all. The certainty that the struggle was inevitable induced them to give up their last pennies to prepare for resistance. You did not prevent them from doing this, though you had no more intention of fighting than Braun and Severing had. Now, because of your stupidity

and helplessness, the workers are compelled to allow themselves to be arrested one by one, expropriated, tortured, and demoralized in concentration camps.

I believed—and many functionaries believed with me—that you had prepared special illegal apparatus for defense of which we knew nothing, but which, when the Fascists drew back for the last blow, would instruct us what we were to do. You were forever boasting, but your wild and insincere speeches, your flaming newspaper articles, your showy congresses, and even your parliamentary committees, frightened no one but the Philistines.

Because you did not take yourselves seriously, you clowns of history, neither did you take Fascism seriously. The workers knew it must be taken seriously. If the party had had democratic control over the apparatus, and if the latter had not been all-powerful over the workers and at the same time subservient to the Comintern, there would never have been such braggaris in the party leadership.

In vain I tried after Hitler's accession to find one leading comrade from whom I could learn what perspective the suddenly silenced leaders actually had, since I could no longer bear to come empty-handed to the workers. But none of you were accessible any more.

So we were deserted. The workers, and all of us who were not in the apparatus. Your entire preparation for illegality consisted in assuring the continued payment of salaries to the officials and continued functioning of party machinery. Otherwise, without having to mobilize his entire army, Hitler could never have destroyed the whole party with the idiotic lie that the Communists had burned the Reichstag.

Victory and defeat without a battle! One simple lie, that we were the ones who set fire to a hideous barracks, was enough to unmask all your boasting about qualities of leadership, and to disarm the German working class and leave it an army without a general staff.

The social democratic leaders—to be sure! If you had taken your own words seriously, you would have realized they would not fight. Or did you base "opportunism" hopes

on them? In that case, why did you never say, "We can fight only if the social democrats strike the first blow"? After Hecker's justification that would have been logical. But what I am reproaching you with is that you had not even prepared a defense and that in the hour of danger you slunk into the bushes without a sound, abandoning the unarmed working class, still waiting for your guidance.

Then when some of us, infuriated that nothing happened and that no defense had been prepared, although you well knew the plans of the Fascists—when at ten o'clock the morning after the fire there were still no leaflets in answer to the monstrous accusation, no protective measures taken, when we finally undertook on our own initiative to help the deserted proletariat, since we were without directives, and watching the unchallenged destruction of our party—then you berated us from your safe hiding places as "undisciplined" and "crack-brained". If you had used your brains beforehand, then those who still acknowledged their responsibility toward the proletariat and sympathized with them, need not have been "headless." You had already reconciled yourselves to the fate of the working class.

We, however, were not the ones to display a bureaucratic hauteur, behind which the greatest egotism is commonly concealed. We who knew that the workers must indeed fight, but not be senselessly sacrificed—we who saw before us all the misery of the disappointed, and neither could nor would wait further for your orders, since we never dreamed that you bankrupts could ever dare again to play the leaders' role—we acted. I went to Denmark not without plan, and not in order to escape. I might have found myself like you, silent and in hiding while the workers bled helplessly.

The Reichstag Fire and the Situation of Comrade Torgler

I saw that you had made no preparations and that at the moment the only possible solution was to mobilize the international proletariat, to explain that we had not burned the Reichstag, and why not. On February 27 I was in the Reichstag and could have explained why comrade Torgler

was innocent. As a result of your losing your heads upon Hitler's accession, as a result of your catastrophic desertion, in despair over the fate of the working class and in consciousness of his innocence, he took a step of individual heroism to save off the worst. You least of all should reproach him with a political error. He was looked up because of your irresponsibility, and in spite of your coalition with lords and countesses this innocent man would have been convicted save for the international proletariat.

And you sit in Paris cafes and criticize, talk big, and seem not at all to realize comrade Torgler's plight in court. You plague him with your disgusting gossip, achieving such miserable results that—for instance—Romain Rolland and Barbusse in Muenzenberg's "*Gegenangriff*" did not even mention Torgler in their praise of Dimitroff and the Bulgarians for their courageous bearing after the first appearance of the defendants. Even if Muenzenberg handed them the assignment in this form, these men must have realized what an insult to Torgler their attitude conveyed. This merely corresponds to the decision of the German Central Committee. At the same time they passed a resolution in Paris, published in *l'Humanité*, in which only comrade Dimitroff's courage was praised. And you mean to tell me you do not practice factional revenge? You do even worse. You know perfectly well that the Fascists dish up for him the filth of your political intrigues and so destroy him more than with shackles.

The German C. E. C. and more especially their political leaders had every reason to give comrade Torgler some recognition, for rarely has a man accused of a political offense been in a more painful situation, not because of the crime of which he was accused, since everyone knows that he and the party are innocent, but because of the party leadership. This leadership abandoned its army and fled to the tall timber without issuing a slogan or even an explanation to the army, as the enemy prepared for the final blow.

How should comrade Torgler defend you to the workers? He was not, like you, in the German leadership. He was only a member of Parliament, and not in your confidence.

ence as to plans, not even as to defense plans, and he believed as I did that it would be impossible for you to abandon the proletariat without a word in their darkest hour. The situation came to a head, your stupidity was exposed by your mysterious silence and lack of any indication of how you estimated the situation or what we were to do.

Your Latest Scintillations

Comrade Torgler was greatly upset over this, as we all were, and tried to speak with the leading comrades. When finally, a few days before the fire, he spoke with a comrade in Thaelmann's immediate circle and requested information, the good man said, "Yes, if the workers don't fight, their organizations will be destroyed, bloody terror will rage, murder of proletarians will become the order of the day, hunger, misery, concentration camps, a Balkanized situation, war against the Soviet Union, and perhaps the end of all culture will be the result. And you especially, he added, "these homosexual sadists will take the greatest pleasure in hanging you in the market place and torturing you to death to satisfy their cravings for cruelty."

I shall never forget with what disgust and indignation comrade Torgler repeated this to me and added, "And these are supposed to be revolutionists! They have always bragged so, and now to have such an outlook and no plan to prevent its realization! And to say that of me—*Pfui Teufel!*" he said; and finally "One might think he really knew something." And now comrade Torgler is actually experiencing these things. Do you suppose that your betrayal of the proletariat without a blow has gone over his head? Why did you not tell the workers all this sooner? Why did you say the Bruening dictatorship was open Fascism and thus hold the workers back from fighting? As long as Heckerl was speaking, why didn't he speak of these sins and others? Do you think the German workers have forgotten? And when I met a woman comrade of the Central Committee the day before the fire, and wished to get the party's perspective from her, she said the same thing. So you knew what was going on, and still you had prepared no defense—only defensive shelters for yourselves!

On February 27 Florin still said stupidly, when I met him in the Reichstag on his way to get a postponement of a trial from comrade Torgler, "If the workers don't fight". That was the answer. Since when do the leaders wait for a command from the soldiers? But at the same time he told me to keep my apartment—perhaps we might remain representatives as in 1923. You were so senseless and brainless that you were left without perspective when the wire from Moscow failed to arrive. Moscow's attitude in this decisive situation should show you however what a catastrophe can befall the working class when the revolutionary movement of any country does not develop its own leadership.

Conscious of his own innocence, full of anger, disgust, and despair in the presence of such irresponsibility and the stealthy disappearance of the leadership, comrade Torgler walked into the Fascist prison, driven by his sense of responsibility to the proletariat, whom he hoped to aid by an act of individual heroism. Comrade Torgler can defend the Communist Party against the stupid, provocative, lying accusation of having staged the Reichstag fire, but he can defend the leadership of the Communist Party to the working class. And that is the reason why you have started an underhanded discussion about him that is of a piece with your behavior before the fire—you, who in the crisis are so boastful in your retreats, and as "great leaders" make the work of the other comrades impossible and finally forbid it altogether because it might develop into a conference for the Red Aid instead of for Muenzenberg's committee treasury, and might be of some service to the German anti-Fascists instead of to Muenzenberg and yourselves.

What Is Necessary

After the German defeat I had occasion to become acquainted with practically all the European sections of the Comintern. Everywhere I encountered the same inability to estimate the political situation and make use of it to develop the revolutionary movement. But for this reason they compensated for it by greater cleverness in intrigue. Al-

though no one dared challenge Moscow with political arguments, everyone worked through intrigue, lying, interception of letters, slander of active comrades, and so forth. The so-called political line is a polychromatic mixture of ultra-Left adventurism and opportunism. Had it never occurred to you that because of your catastrophic desertion the Communist Party has lost standing all over the world? Don't you even follow the election returns? If such preposterous political bankrupts do not step off the stage of history by themselves, then it is time for the indignation of the workers to sweep them away, since they are no longer to be taken seriously and the workers are making strides toward building a new Communist Party, independent of Moscow, and a new International which will not tolerate an all-powerful apparatus, cut loose from the workers and reigning over them, but will carry out a program of democratic control by the workers over the apparatus and its employees. Only in this way can the working class carry through its historic mission as liberator of humanity. That will be difficult, but it is the only way, because the hope of rejuvenating the parties of the Comintern does not exist any more, since after the frightful German defeat, which was a defeat for the whole world proletariat, the bankrupt leading caste was not thrown out together with its disastrous policies. With such leadership the revolutionary movement can be carried to the grave for the sake of a paid apparatus which has nothing whatever to do with a living Bolshevik struggle.

I spurn the fleshpots of Moscow and the meal ticket provided by your apparatus, as long as I can function in the proletarian struggle for freedom. If you were as proficient in organizing the revolution as you are in intrigue and political defeatism, Fascism could never have taken hold of Germany.

Amsterdam, October 26, 1933